

Statewide Interoperability Coordinators Newsletter



volume six, september 2009

A Note from Chris Essid



As many of you know, September marks the 6th annual National Preparedness Month. I am pleased to share that the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) is participating in National Preparedness Month by partnering with the Ready Campaign, a national effort to encourage Americans to take simple steps to prepare for emergencies in their homes, businesses, and communities. Through the Ready Campaign, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and its partners are reminding both emergency responders and private citizens to take responsibility for safety and preparedness. I hope that you will use this opportunity to reach out to the public safety agencies in your State to tell them about National Preparedness Month and promote your efforts.

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MOU and SOP Template Suite and Reference Library

OEC recently released the Formal Agreement and Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Template Suite and Reference Library.

The Formal Agreement and SOP Template Suite, available on the [SAFECOM website](#), contains nine templates that help expedite the process of creating a formal agreement or SOP focusing on communications interoperability. The Template Suite, which was vetted throughout its construction by members of the emergency response community, includes guidance documents for the creation of a:

- Charter
- Executive Order
- State to Local Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
- Local to Local MOU
- System-to-System Console Patch SOP
- Mobile Gateway SOP
- Shared Channel SOP
- Shared System SOP
- Radio Cache SOP

The Template Suite is also available on the [National Interoperability Information eXchange \(NIIX\) website](#) in addition to the Formal Agreement and SOP Reference Library, which contains over 200 real-world formal agreement and SOP examples that emergency responders can reference. The documents contained in the Library were collected earlier this year when OEC issued a nationwide call among stakeholders requesting the submission of formal agreements and SOPs relating to communications interoperability.

Taken together, the Formal Agreement and SOP Template Suite and Reference Library satisfy the following two National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP) Milestones:

"Within 12 months, DHS will establish a central repository of model formal agreements (i.e., Memoranda of Agreement [MOA], MOU, and Mission Assignments) and information that will enhance interstate and intrastate coordination."

"Within 12 months, DHS identifies and refines model SOPs for emergency communications during specific types of incidents and all-hazards response (beyond tactical communications)."

Questions or concerns relating to the Formal Agreement and SOP Template Suite and Reference Library should be directed to OEC@hq.dhs.gov. ■

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Meet the Coordinators



Kansas – Jason R. Moses

Interoperable Communications Coordinator, Kansas Office of Emergency Communications, Kansas Adjutant General's Department

I serve as the Statewide Interoperability Coordinator for Kansas working out of the Adjutant General's Department. For several decades my family owned and operated a two-way radio business. Essentially, I was born into a world of emergency communications. Rejecting the opportunity to continue in the communications field, I chose a career in public service. As many folks know, it is common in small jurisdictions to be a part of many disciplines, often times simultaneously. Although most of my public safety experience has been in law enforcement, I have also enjoyed serving in public utilities, volunteer fire, emergency management, dispatch communications, and on the local city council. This broad array of experience has been extremely valuable while conducting multi-disciplinary events concerning interoperable communications.

In Kansas, the Adjutant General is charged with leading the Army and Air National Guard, State Emergency Management, and State Homeland Security. The Adjutant General's Department is one of several State and local agencies paving the way toward statewide interoperability. I began my duties in July of 2007, shortly before the Governor formed the Kansas Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC) by executive order. The Kansas SIEC is a nine member committee including multi-jurisdictional and multi-disciplinary representation from multiple levels of government. Parts of my duties include acting as staff support for the SIEC. Earlier this year, I was able to hire two Communications Training and Exercise Specialists. Collectively, we have become known as the Kansas Office of Emergency Communications (KS-OEC).

At the KS-OEC, we live by the motto that interoperability is 10% technology and 90% planning, training, and cooperation. For many years, technology alone had been used in an effort to enhance interoperable communications. Through the efforts of the Kansas Department of Transportation and cooperation from State, regional, and local agencies, a dual purpose statewide system (wide area trunking/multi-band gateway) is being constructed. Additionally, many agencies have purchased gateway devices and updated radio equipment in many spectrums. The technology was there, but we lacked commonly recognized frequency standards, SOPs, and formal training. Working with the SIEC and other agencies, we have since begun the ongoing development of frequency standards, SOPs, and formal training. In June of 2009, KS-OEC staff began a massive training initiative. In less than a five week period, staff provided training in 47 locations reaching nearly 1,000 students in the Eastern and South-Central regions of Kansas. Although in its earliest stages, the training initiative is already proving its worth, indicated by the increase of the adoption of standard frequencies and increased use of many of the technologies. There has been great progress made in Kansas, and it is exciting to imagine where we will be going.....now that the 90% is being considered at the same time we are pursuing the 10%. ■



Missouri – Stephen T. Devine

Interoperability Program Manager, Missouri Department of Public Safety

After 22 years in operational and technical duties within the Communications Division of the Missouri State Highway Patrol and a short stint in the private sector supporting public safety communications, I currently hold the position of Missouri Interoperability Program Manager within the Missouri Department of Public Safety. I provide outreach and education to facilitate interoperability throughout Missouri's 114 counties and the City of St. Louis.

My background as a supervisor and dispatcher in the Missouri State Highway Patrol Troop Headquarters gave me operational experience in interoperable communications between agencies and fostered my appreciation for the need for "operability" in both urban and rural areas. I strive to apply those principles in my role as Missouri Statewide Interoperability Coordinator. As the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) Local Frequency Advisor and Chairperson of the Region 24 (Missouri) 700 and 800 MHz Regional Planning Committees, I've been able to work with the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC) and regions nationally. I find regional planning to be a critical element of public safety spectrum management and frequency coordination and I continue that role today within the National Regional Planning Council (NRPC), an advocacy body that supports training and development of 700 and 800 MHz regional planning in 55 regions as established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

I am past Chairman of the NPSTC Spectrum Management Committee and APCO's Automated Frequency Coordination Advisory Committee as well as Missouri APCO Chapter Past President. I participated in the National Coordination Committee (NCC), a Federal advisory committee formed to develop the rules for new 700 MHz public safety spectrum that resulted from the digital television (DTV) transition and chaired the NCC Interoperability Subcommittee's Working Group on Rules, Policy, and Spectrum Planning. In addition, I have been fortunate to represent the State of Missouri and APCO in Congressional Testimony on several important public safety issues such as communications interoperability, grant funding, and the DTV transition. These experiences have allowed me to understand the issues important to public safety agencies and express to policy makers the position of those agencies.

I have found that achieving interoperability is mostly about coordinating work efforts and is less about technology. Technology can contribute to raising the interoperability quotient of a community.

In the future, I look forward to working with the OEC and other Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (SWICs) on interoperability obstacles and the methods needed to overcome those obstacles. ■

Border Interoperability Demonstration Project

OEC is preparing to release a Funding Opportunity Announcement for a new competitive grant project for enhancing public safety communications along our Nation's international borders. The Border Interoperability Demonstration Project (BIDP) will help States and localities explore innovative and effective models for interoperable emergency communications in border regions. OEC is seeking innovative approaches that improve emergency communications along and across the border and can be shared with and adapted to other U.S. border communities.

At least three U.S.-Canadian border communities and at least three U.S.-Mexican border communities will be selected to participate in this demonstration project. State Administrative Agencies (SAAs) from the 17 States with international land and water boundaries with Canada or Mexico (AK, AZ, CA, ID, ME, MI, MN, MT, ND, NH, NM, NY, OH, PA, TX, VT, and WA) are eligible to apply for funding.

If you are a SWIC in an eligible State, you may be asked to play a role in preparing your State's BIDP application. Potential roles include engaging your SAA to review grant application processes and vision for pursuing Federal grant funding, and contacting communities along the border to discuss interoperability issues and solutions that may be developed into a proposal. As the SWIC, you may facilitate BIDP application planning and coordination between border communities and the SAA.

For potential applicants' reference, OEC will release an Announcement of Future BIDP Funding Opportunity and Frequently Asked Questions via the SWIC e-mail list. OEC encourages you to share these materials with border communities in your State, and collaborate with local and tribal governments, academia, and non-governmental organization partners on potential applications. OEC will post the official BIDP Funding Opportunity Announcement on Grants.gov this fall. ■

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For more information and ideas of how you and your State partners can participate, visit the [National Preparedness Month website](http://NationalPreparednessMonth.gov).

In July, each of you submitted your updated Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan (SCIP) Implementation Report. Our initial review of the reports validated what we already knew: that each of you are undertaking important work that is having a huge impact on our nationwide effort. We know that it is largely through the great work at the State and local level that we will collectively meet the goals of the NECP. Thank you for your tireless effort focused in advancing statewide communications interoperability.

We plan to discuss a summary of the reports and the NECP goals at the next SWIC meeting. As we prepare for this meeting, please be sure to let us know how we can best use that meeting to support your efforts. If you would like to join the planning team or provide input into the agenda, e-mail [Amanda Musser](mailto:Amanda.Musser@dhs.gov) at Amanda.Musser@dhs.gov.

Finally, we look forward to working with you in this coming fiscal year to address the challenges you've listed in your SCIP Implementation Report and as you implement your SCIP initiatives. In October, we will notify you of your approved technical assistance requests and begin scheduling the FY 2010 SCIP Implementation Workshops. As always, we welcome your feedback at OEC@hq.dhs.gov. ■

FY 2010 IECGP Update

On August 4, 26 SWICs participated in a conference call to provide input into the development of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP).

The grant guidance and application kit, expected to be released later this fall outlines the grant program's priorities and requirements for applying for funding. Participants on the call provided valuable input on the grant program's priorities and allowable cost activities.

OEC thanks the SWICs who participated in the conference call and those who provided input by e-mail. OEC and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Grant Programs Directorate are currently drafting the FY 2010 grant guidance and application kit incorporating the input received from the SWICs. For additional information on IECGP, please contact OEC@hq.dhs.gov. ■

CONTRIBUTE TO THE SWIC NEWSLETTER

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE ARTICLES FOR UPCOMING SWIC NEWSLETTERS TO HIGHLIGHT INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN YOUR STATE OR TERRITORY, PLEASE CONTACT OEC@HQ.DHS.GOV

OEC Staff Spotlight



Kevin Baggett

Kevin joined the Federal staff of the OEC in December 2008 as a Telecommunications Specialist for OEC's Technical

Assistance Branch. Prior to beginning at OEC, Kevin retired from the Army with 25 years of service as a Telecommunications Chief. During his Army career, Kevin held every position available from Team Member to Network Support Company Sergeant Major. The majority of Kevin's Army career was spent as a Paratrooper at Fort Bragg, North Carolina as a Telecommunications Chief in the 82nd Airborne Division and United States Army Special Operations Command. He toured in Germany, Turkey, and served in the New York City Recruiting Battalion as a Detailed Recruiter. Kevin has an extensive background in emergency no-notice telecommunications support with a focus on single and multi channel voice and data switching systems. Kevin has provided communications support nationally for hurricane relief efforts and abroad during Operations *Golden Pheasant* in Honduras, *Just Cause* in Panama, *Desert Shield/Storm* in Saudi Arabia/Kuwait, *Uphold Democracy* in Haiti, and *Enduring Freedom III* and *Enduring Freedom VII* in Afghanistan. He was awarded two Bronze Stars for Meritorious Service for his work in Afghanistan. Kevin holds an Associate of Arts Degree in Business Management from Fayetteville Technical Community College. ■



Jon Clinton

Jon joined the Federal staff of the OEC in February 2009 as a Program Analyst for OEC's Stakeholder Engagement

and Outreach team. Jon had been supporting OEC as a Senior Consultant with Touchstone Consulting Group since February 2007. He has been working on DHS interoperable communications efforts since 2004, supporting the Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) before joining the OEC team. His focus has been on SCIPs, Federal grant coordination, tools and guidance document development, stakeholder coordination, and general policy analysis. Prior to his work with Touchstone, Jon also spent time in Washington as a Research Associate for the Council on Hemispheric Affairs and with the government affairs branch of SpaceX Corporation. Jon holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Michigan and will complete a Master of Public Administration at American University this year. ■

Calendar

September

OEC-Sponsored Communications Unit Leader (COML) Training Course

15-17 – Egg Harbor Township, NJ

30-Oct. 2 – Sierra Vista, AZ

State/Locally-Sponsored COML Training Course

23-25 – Kansas City, MO

COML Training Course-Train the Trainer

16 – Centennial, CO

18 – Seattle, WA

22 – Kansas City, MO

NACo Interoperable Policy Forum

24-25 – Phoenix, AZ

October

OEC-Sponsored COML Training Course

6-8 – Springfield, IL

6-8 – Rapid City, SD

6-8 – Laredo, TX

19-21 – Bismark, ND

27-29 – Boise, ID

State/Locally-Sponsored COML Training Course

20-22 – Colorado Springs, CO

COML Training Course-Train the Trainer

15 – San Antonio, TX

20 – Albany, NY

November

OEC-Sponsored COML Training Course

2-4 – Little Rock, AR

17-19 – Honolulu, HI

17-19 – Saco, ME

About the SWIC Newsletter

The *SWIC Newsletter* is designed to be a source of information, news, and updates for SWICs and their staff. We hope that it will be a valuable resource as you lead your SCIP implementation efforts, future statewide planning, and alignment to the NECP.

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Gateway Training

An invaluable tool during a disaster is the communications interconnect systems known as gateways. Thousands of agencies across the Nation have purchased gateways, which allow radios to communicate even if they utilize different protocols or if they are on different frequencies. However, as gateways are rarely used on a daily basis, emergency responders often lack the knowledge needed for basic operation and don't regularly perform maintenance to ensure that the system operates effectively when needed.

To address the need for gateway refresher training, OEC offers gateway training as part of the Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP). In preparation for the 2009 Hurricane season, OEC conducted 12 classes in the Gulf Coast region to provide additional support to agencies identified by SWICs. These full day workshops consisted of classroom instruction, practical demonstrations, and hands-on practice.

Alabama was the first Gulf State to receive assistance. From June 2-5, 2009, OEC held four workshops across the State. The primary focus was to solve a repeater ping-pong effect that was taking place during patches. In addition, operators of Alabama Wide Area Interoperability System (WAIS) were under the impression that they could not run the local ACU controller software in the vans. To address this problem, the OEC ICTAP facilitator explained what was causing the interference, and then worked with the participants to develop a solution. Alabama officials now use the local controller software for the ease of adjusting the individual modules, and the WAIS software for interfacing through the network to see the picture of the State. "This is exactly what we needed, not a sales pitch but the good, the bad, and the best practices," said one participant of the Alabama Workshop.

Four workshops held in Florida, from June 8-12, 2009, also provided attendees with the opportunity to update software and correct connectivity issues. Florida SWIC Terry Brinson said, "It was obvious that the material and presentation were great and applicable to what the attendees needed. [I received] a lot of positive feedback from attendees – who have many years in public safety communications – that felt they really learned some valuable information."

In Columbia, South Carolina, workshop participants were able to resolve connections issues with their Incident Commanders' Radio Interface (ICRI) when connecting through a trunked radio system. State officials could only hear conversations in one direction, so the OEC ICTAP facilitator explained the process of adding a delay to the ICRI. "This is not a vendor-provided class. This is a hands-on class that provides both the pros and cons of using gateway devices with different systems and technologies. The more we know about them, the better," said Lauent Britton, a radio system specialist from Charleston County.

Two workshops were held in Georgia during the month of August. Nick Brown, Georgia SWIC said, "these workshops provided valuable information to our partner agencies that will aid in their communications roles in their daily and disaster response role." At the Forsyth Workshop, FEMA Prepositioned Strike Team (PST-6) brought Prepositioned Equipment Program tractor trailers to show the participants what could be expected if FEMA was requested during a large-scale incident. Westleon Paul Rogers, Deputy Lead PST-6, said that the workshops "gave us more information about systems like [the Radio InterOperability System] (RIOS) than we learned in a 2-day class on the RIOS."

The gateway course can be found in the [OEC Technical Assistance Catalog](#) under the heading ENG-AG: Audio Gateway Information and Training. In addition to on-site training, OEC has also developed an interactive gateway training CD based on the workshop curriculum. CD requests should be directed to OEC@hq.dhs.gov. ■

New York Public Safety Interoperability Symposium

By Vincent R. Stile, Acting Interoperability Coordinator, New York State

In November of 2008, the National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices, with support from the OEC and the OIC, selected New York State and five other States to participate in a new policy academy, *Public Safety Interoperable Communications: Focus on Governance*. Each State was awarded up to \$50,000 to support a governance-specific project.

New York's Statewide Interoperability Program Office (SIPO) used the grant to host a two-day conference, which was something this office had never done. On July 1, 2009 New York State put on its first Public Safety Interoperability Symposium in Albany, New York. With a focus on governance, the goal of the Symposium was to help State and local policy makers improve State interoperability governance structures that oversee public safety communications interoperability planning and implementation. The two-day event brought together nearly 250 attendees including government executives; county, State, and Federal first responders; tribal associations; neighboring contiguous Border States and Canada; and the Statewide Interoperability Program Advisory Council to discuss statewide interoperability and policy recommendations. The conference used a combination of panels and presentations from government executives, national subject matter experts, and neighboring States. Sessions focused on creating a comprehensive understanding of the importance of interoperability among public safety wireless networks and sharing best practices to advance governance.

The preparation for this conference was an extreme lesson in team work and an enthusiastic desire to put on an educational program for the conference attendees in what seemed to be an unrealistic short amount of time. For additional information on SIPO visit <http://www.cio.ny.gov/SIPO/Aboutsiipo/aboutsiipo.htm> or contact Vincent Stile, Acting Interoperability Coordinator. ■

FCC Nationwide Interoperability Channels and the Missouri SIEC Template for Consistent Channel Usage and Best Practices

By Stephen T. Devine, Interoperability Program Manager, Missouri Department of Public Safety

In 2000 the FCC, in the process of developing the rules for the public safety 700 MHz band, identified the need for multi-disciplinary public safety interoperability channels throughout the radio spectrum. The channels would be designated in the shared spectrum (VHF and UHF) below 512 MHz, and were to be similar to those already existing in the 800 MHz band and anticipated for the new 700 MHz public safety band. The FCC noted that while non-discipline specific interoperability channels were successfully utilized by public safety in other bands, there were only discipline-specific interoperability channels existing within the public safety spectrum below 512 MHz.

The FCC identified these new channels for multi-disciplinary use nationwide and provided a multi-year transition process for co-channel and adjacent channel users of the identified frequencies to migrate from their existing use, making the new channels available for nationwide interoperability for all public safety users. These channels are today known collectively as “VTAC” and “UTAC” channels and are “licensed by rule”, meaning that as long as the user is authorized to operate in one of several public safety bands, they are able to utilize these channels for portable and mobile use without an FCC-issued authorization. Base and Control Station use of these channels requires coordination and an authorization from the FCC. The “licensed by rule” or “blanket licensing” mechanism allows maximum implementation of the interoperability channels with the least amount of regulatory burden on the user community.

Table 1 shows the VHF nationwide public safety interoperability channels, which are all simplex channels.

| Base & Mobile Frequency | FCC Label | NPSTC Name |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 155.7525 MHz | VCALL* | VCALL10 |
| 151.1375 MHz | VTAC1* | VTAC11 |
| 154.4525 MHz | VTAC2* | VTAC12 |
| 158.7375 MHz | VTAC3* | VTAC13 |
| 159.4725 MHz | VTAC4* | VTAC14 |

Table 1 – VHF Nationwide Public Safety Interoperability Channels

Table 2 shows the UHF nationwide public safety interoperability channels, which are all duplex channels (paired frequencies) for repeater operation. Simplex “Talk Around” on these interoperability channels is authorized on the Base Channel frequency.

| Base Frequency | Mobile Frequency | FCC Label | NPSTC Name |
|----------------|------------------|-----------|------------|
| 453.2125 MHz | 458.2125 MHz | UCALL* | UCALL40 |
| 453.2125 MHz | 453.2125 MHz | UCALLα* | UCALL40D |
| 453.4625 MHz | 458.4625 MHz | UTAC1* | UTAC41 |
| 453.4625 MHz | 453.4625 MHz | UTAC1α* | UTAC41D |
| 453.7125 MHz | 458.7125 MHz | UTAC2* | UTAC42 |
| 453.7125 MHz | 453.7125 MHz | UTAC2α* | UTAC42D |
| 453.8625 MHz | 458.8625 MHz | UTAC3* | UTAC43 |
| 453.8625 MHz | 453.8625 MHz | UTAC3α* | UTAC43D |

Table 2 – UHF Nationwide Public Safety Interoperability Channels

The FCC's designation of these channels for nationwide interoperability introduced a multi-disciplinary approach to the VHF and UHF public safety bands. However, it was crucial that the implementation of the channels was consistent within each State and region as well as on a national basis to ensure success. To address this issue, the Missouri Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee developed a MOU for local agencies to standardize the use of these channels. For additional information on the MOU and its contents, it is available for review and download at: <http://www.dps.mo.gov/HomelandSecurity/Adobe/PDF%20SIEC%20MOU%20Vs%203%20September%202005.pdf>

The use of these nationwide interoperability channels in VHF and UHF public safety bands should complement the existing discipline-specific interoperability channels in these bands. Discipline-specific channels can still be used within each discipline while the multi-disciplinary channels can be utilized to bridge disciplines to promote interoperability within the Incident Command System. ■

Statewide-NECP Alignment

As featured in past newsletters, OEC identified eight NECP milestones with recommended actions applicable to the States and territories. The next milestone is highlighted below. For more information about the NECP or OEC, please contact OEC@hq.dhs.gov.

NECP Initiative 3.1: Common Operational Protocols and Procedures

Milestone: By January 31, 2010, program an appropriate set of frequency-band-specific nationwide interoperability channels into all existing emergency responder radios and preprogram an appropriate set of frequency-band-specific nationwide

interoperability channels into emergency response radios that are manufactured or purchased through Federal funding.

How OEC Can Help:

- National Interoperability Field Operations Guide (NIFOG) is available at http://www.npstc.org/documents/NIFOG_1_3.pdf.
- OEC can provide training and technical assistance on the NIFOG.
- Emergency communications grant funding can be used for programming nationwide interoperability channels costs.

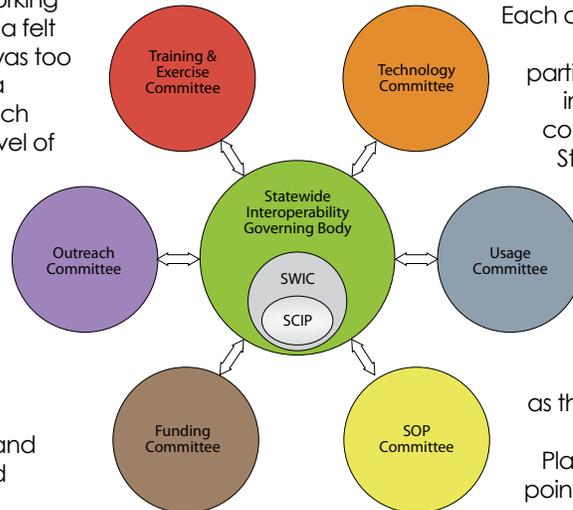
Oklahoma Revises Governance Structure for More Effective Statewide Planning

By Nikki Cassingham, Statewide IOC Planning Coordinator, Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security

In order to address the status of interoperability in the State of Oklahoma and comply with national standards, the Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security (OKOHS) originally established the Oklahoma Statewide Interoperable Executive Committee (OIEC) and the Governance Working Group (GWG) in 2007. Oklahoma felt that this governance structure was too hierarchical in nature and that a governance structure where each component was at the same level of influence would lead to more valued participation. In May 2009, per recommendations from the SCIP Implementation Workshop, the governance structure was revised to adopt the standards recommended by OEC.

The new governance structure essentially combined the OIEC and the GWG into a single body and is referred to as the Statewide Interoperability Governing Body (SIGB). The SIGB also includes six subcommittees, aligned to the Interoperability Continuum: Training and Exercise, Outreach, Funding, SOPs, Usage, and Technology. The SIGB represents a diverse group of public safety officials from different levels of government across the State and

creates a foundation for allowing each of Oklahoma's eight homeland security regions to identify their unique needs and contribute to statewide solutions. The following diagram shows how the SIGB is organized.



Each component of the new governance structure is now at the same level, allowing for equal participation from all members. The SCIP remains in the center of the SIGB, as it is the basis for all communications interoperability planning in the State. Local government members of the SIGB – not State employees – have agreed to be the chairs of the committees.

To effectively implement the SCIP, the OKOHS allocated resources for two staff members to lead this effort. I serve as the Statewide Interoperable Communications Planning Coordinator (commonly referred to as the SWIC) and Chelsea Grogan is the Assistant Statewide Interoperability Communications Planning Coordinator. Together we serve as the point of contact for managing the development, planning, and maintenance of the SCIP and meeting the criteria of the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) grant. As part of my role, I serve as the chair of the SIGB. For more information about our governance model, contact [me](#) or [Chelsea Grogan](#). ■

Reducing Vendor Costs

By Mike Simpson, Texas Statewide Communications Interoperability Coordinator and Texas Department of Public Safety Assistant Director Designee

The Texas Governor's Office and Department of Public Safety has developed an effective vendor accountability process. Before Texas implemented this process, vendors would quote services in one large dollar amount that was difficult to pull apart and understand. To combat this practice, Texas implemented a standardized, detailed line item equipment and services quotation and invoicing form. Vendors must now break down PSIC Grant Program quotes to show equipment quantity, model number, description, list price, discounted price, and discount percentage. Services must also be spelled-out to indicate the number of person-hours (or person-days) being quoted for each type of service and must specify what hourly/daily rate is being charged.

In the past, some vendors had customers sign "milestone payment" contracts requiring payment of a specified percentage upon contract execution, another percentage payment when equipment shipped, etc. Texas found that this type of payment scheme is not conducive to proper auditing. The State wanted to be able to tie invoice payments to specific pieces of equipment and/or services delivered. Under the adopted procedure, vendors can invoice only equipment and services that have been delivered and accepted by the grant sub-recipient, attaching serial numbers of equipment items when applicable. An authorized vendor representative must sign a certification that the invoice is accurate. This accountability process means that vendors only get paid for services they actually perform.

Under the new process, if there is an unspent balance at the end of the project, Texas asks the vendor to provide additional equipment and/or services equal to that balance before they are entitled to those funds.

Texas estimates that on the PSIC Grant Program they will increase their buying power by 5%, which amounts to \$3.25 million in additional equipment/services. Before the new system was in place, this balance would have accrued to vendor bottom lines at no benefit to Texas. The phrase "Don't Mess with Texas" has taken on a whole new meaning! ■